

# THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

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## CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES IN PRISON CAMPS

News has recently reached us concerning the vigorous religious life which is making itself felt in some of the camps in which British and French prisoners are held captive by the Germans.

The following passage (taken from the International Christian Press and Information Service) describes nothing less than a missionary exhibition organised by French Christians in a German prison camp:—

"I have delayed writing you so that I could tell you at the same time about the French Empire exhibition for which you sent us many documents which have been very useful for our exhibit. Between the neighbouring Catholic Mission booth and our booth for Protestant Missions we hung a sign stating how many people still remain in the world to be evangelised. A large Cross mounted on the globe stood in front of this sign.

"A large stained-glass window representing the victory of the Cross over pagan idols was in the centre of our booth. At the right and left were panels decorated with maps and photographs briefly tracing the history of missions and giving statistics of the different Protestant missions in the French possessions, as well as French missions in non-French territory. The Gabon was used to illustrate the details of a mission field.

"In front of the window was an open Bible on a reading desk above a New Testament in the Malgache language and a book showing specimen of translations of the Bible in 710 languages and dialects. To the right of the reading desk: a model of a missionary compound with the church, the school and the missionary's house. To the left: a collection

of books on missions, with the suggestion that they could be obtained at the Protestant library. New Testaments and the book *Jesus of Nazareth* were offered to visitors until none remained.

"The exhibition lasted from June 14-23 and was a great success. The Church prepared for it by a missionary week which began with a service emphasising mission work. Four lectures were given during the week: The History of Missions; Their Spirit; A Missionary Pioneer—François Coillard; Missions To-day. The Whit Sunday service, followed by Communion, closed the week."

*The Methodist Recorder* for August 19th included a short article on the work of Methodist chaplains in the prison camps by the Rev. Joseph Firth, M.C. We quote from the article:—

"One of them writes that he feels he is one of the busiest persons in Methodism. He says: 'Recently I received my fourth team into membership of the Church, the number being thirteen. We are now starting a lecture mission, and I have trained a team of six for this purpose. We have already enrolled fifty candidates, and we hope to increase this number to one hundred and forty-twenty per lecturer. In this campaign we are including all denominations. Over five hundred took Communion on Easter Sunday. In addition, we have a new course of Bible study just beginning.' Such activity, besides all the social work necessitated by the abnormal way of living, suggests the chaplain is right when he says he is busy.

"A letter from another chaplain reads as follows: 'On Sunday I had five services, be-

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sides a Communion service. In this compound I had a Communion service for the officers at 8 a.m., when seventy officers were present, and another service at 10 a.m. At 10.45 a.m. I went to another compound and about three hundred and fifty attended the service. At 11.30 a.m. I went to still another compound and had a congregation of three hundred. At 6.30 a.m. I had a service for the non-commissioned officers, and about two hundred and fifty were present. In all, over a thousand officers and men entered heartily into the services during the day. The hunger for spiritual things is amazing. I am thankful to be here because of the glorious opportunities of helping these men.'

"From the same source there comes a story about the shortage of Bibles and New Testaments: 'At the request of the men we have now services every evening, and we are going through the Gospel of St. Mark. The man who reads the lesson keeps the Bible for one day! We have to loan out our very few Bibles and New Testaments. Hundreds of men are asking for them, and unfortunately we cannot get any. Having no hymn books, we have to write out all our hymns.' Need I say this shortage has been relieved through the good offices of the Book Room and our own Welfare Fund.

"Another chaplain, who is in an officers' prisoner-of-war camp, tells us that, in addition to his other religious activities, he is preparing several officers to become local preachers. He adds the request that, having lost everything, he would be glad to have the necessary books and literature to help him in this work. Again we were able to meet the need."

#### THE CHURCHES PREPARE FOR PEACE

Carlyle Morgan writes as follows in the *Christian Science Monitor* (U.S.A.), Aug. 4th, 1943:

"If the methods used by the National Opinion Research Centre at the University of Denver are reasonably representative, more than 80,000,000 Americans want their churches to take part in formulating the peace. The research centre samples popular opinion in each geographical section of the country, aiming at a proper proportion of 'rich and poor, young and old, men and women,' and minority groups. Lately it put this question up for answer:

"Do you think that the churches should make plans for the kind of peace which should be established after the

war, or don't you think this is a part of their work?"

"The votes came back: 'should make plans,' 63 per cent.; 'not their work,' 33 per cent.; 'undecided,' 4 per cent. Two out of three persons queried favoured church participation in peace planning.

"This result reflects an awareness of the nature of the conflict between what Hitler called 'two worlds.' It displays, too, some understanding of the prerequisites of durable peace. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr writes in a recent issue of *Fortune Magazine*:

"Every great crisis in world history represents a breakdown both in the organization of civilization and in the life of a culture. It is a spiritual as well as a political and economic crisis."

"And in a book by Dr. Henry M. Wriston, published late last week and reviewed on this page ("Challenge to Freedom"), the relation of the spiritual to the political crisis of these times is restated: 'No other source of freedom has ever been discovered; if we cannot accept its spiritual foundation, there is no foundation. . . . Hitler . . . with swift intuition recognized religion as the enemy.' One of the 'Four Freedoms' is freedom of religion.

"Evidently a majority of free people recognize religion as their friend, their ally, their support.

"But the churches had accepted responsibility for helping to plan the peace long before the research centre switched on its green light. The scope and depth of inquiry being conducted among church leaders and laymen on post-war policies would amaze anyone who has not been fully aware of this encouraging development in public education, with its significant religious background.

"The work of church groups is by no means confined to conferences and discussion meetings, important as many of these are. Out of the organizations which promote such meetings there flows a stream of well-thought-out publications on peace questions. These include expertly prepared outlines to guide individual and group study, regular reports on group activities, bibliographies of important books on world affairs, and other guide-posts.

"One outstanding example of the churches' contribution to education is the programme called 'The Six Pillars of Peace.' This is the work of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. The wording of the 'pillars'—six statements of post-war aims—shows their authors to have been idealists

guided by practical understanding of political actualities.

"Favourable comment on this programme has appeared in this newspaper under the signatures of such lay leaders as Sumner Welles, Under-Secretary of State, Francis B. Sayre, of the State Department, Senator Joseph H. Ball, Governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York. And the 'Six Pillars' have just been endorsed by leaders of the British Council of Churches.

"The endorsement shows that American and British views on post-war organization are moving in the same direction, even where some had expected sharp differences of opinion. Its effect will be felt far beyond the council rooms of religious leaders.

"Meanwhile the education of churchgoers as to the position of their country in the world promises to develop a political factor for peace which will be the stronger because based on a Christian concept of brotherhood."

#### A VIVID LETTER FROM HOLLAND

The following is the text of a letter from a Dutch theologian. It throws a particularly vivid light on present conditions in that country.

"How happy I am to find that it is possible for me to write to you. I was most grateful to receive your last letter, but a long time has gone by now and much has happened since then.

"My only son has been taken away to Germany with several thousand students. I do not know his address, nor where he is, or how he is occupied.

"The students nearly all refused to sign a declaration of loyalty and were sent away at the beginning of May.

"About half of them are in hiding, but it was not possible for all. The Theological Faculty has almost disappeared. No more lectures are held. Everything has to be done by private correspondence.

"You cannot think how family life has suffered here. The Church (or rather, the churches) grow wonderfully on account of the trials they are going through. The younger generation is growing up to manhood in quite a different way from anything we had imagined. They often show a striking loyalty to the Faith.

"About fifty pastors of our church are under arrest and many others are living a very precarious life. Nothing is being written or printed and it is no longer possible to get foreign books."

#### GREEK PATRIARCH ON BRITISH ROYAL HOUSE

*Pantainos*, the journal of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, in its issue of June 21st, wrote as follows on the attendance of the King at church during his visit to the troops in North Africa:

"We read in the account of the arrival of the King of England, George VI, in North Africa that the King, despite all the occupations with which his programme was heavily loaded, insisted on going to church 'somewhere in North Africa' on the Sunday of Pentecost, and joining in prayer with 600 sailors of the Royal Navy. In the royal court in England, as is well known, there is a genuine religious spirit, as in the days of the pious and powerful Queen Victoria. Happy the people governed by such a King, who, in the words of the Prophet-King, 'hopeth in the Lord: in the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved.'"

#### THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES MAKES ITS ANNUAL REPORT

The annual report of the World Council of Churches (the headquarters of which are in Geneva) covering the period July, 1942-June, 1943, has appeared.

The introduction dwells on the very great significance of the fact that so many Churches have once again learned what the New Testament means by tribulation and have found a new certainty of faith, a new definiteness in their message as a result of that testing time. It says:

"What will this new experience mean for the ecumenical movement? It will mean that its life will become more dangerous and more relevant. More dangerous, for as our whole movement appropriates the experience of the tested Churches, it will no doubt enter into a period of great tension. There will be the tension in the life of the movement itself which arises inevitably where deep convictions have taken root and where the question of truth has priority over all questions of opportunity or organisation. There will also be a new tension in our relation to the world, for a tested Church is a free Church which renders its witness fearlessly in the face of all forms of human sin.

"But also more relevant. For an 'experienced' ecumenical movement will have a word for the world such as the world can hear nowhere else. It will not speak in hypothetic or opportunistic ways, but bring a certain

word of God to a world which is torn in its mind between its uncertainty and its false certainties. It will have a new sense of proportion, more faith in God's slow but sure ways of working, and less faith in organisation. And so it will be able to serve the world by confronting it with the radical choice between God's Judgment and God's Grace."

In the section on "Contacts" we read:

"During this year it has become very clear that where there is an ecumenical will to keep contact with the fellowship there is also an ecumenical way to maintain or to renew that contact. Normal travelling and normal correspondence have become far more difficult, but these are compensated in so many different ways that the relationships with the Churches have not greatly decreased in quantity and have greatly increased in quality as compared to more peaceful times. . . .

"Three new acceptances of the invitation to join the World Council have come in during the period under review. Thus eighty Churches in twenty-eight countries have now accepted the invitation to join the Council

"That in the fourth year of this war the ecumenical movement is not merely in existence, but that it is a more substantial reality than ever before, is a fact which makes one deeply and gratefully astonished about God's ways with His people."

Concerning the ecumenical study work the report states:

"The studies on the two main subjects: 'The Ethical Function of the Church' and 'The Church and the International Order' are being pursued. . . . It must, however, be said that the difficulty of communications, particularly between the Continent and the other part of the world, has greatly hampered the process of exchanging material."

The prisoner-of-war work is fully described. We quote:

"As the war goes on the service to prisoners keeps growing. . . . A few figures may illustrate the development. From the summer of 1940 to the summer of 1942, we sent out some 140,000 Bibles, New Testaments, books or brochures. During the last twelve months we have sent out 141,000. . . .

"The prisoners work is not only a service rendered by the Churches to the prisoners, but also a service rendered by the prisoners to the Churches. The Churches help their imprisoned members to feel that they are surrounded by the wide fellowship of the Una Sancta. But the prisoners help the Churches by demonstrating precisely when

men feel lonely and uprooted that the Gospel is there to give them hope and to create a new deep communion between them. It is not the least important part of our task to pass on this message from the young, active congregations 'in captivity' to the old and not always active congregations in the home-countries."

The following paragraph introduces the section on the Refugees:—

"Twelve months ago we thought that the suffering of the refugees could not grow worse. But to-day the situation of the first half of 1942 appears very tolerable as compared to what was to come. The wave of deportations which began in the summer of 1942, and which has touched one country after another, has brought such unspeakable misery that no human language can adequately describe it. In this situation the work of rescue, of consolation and relief, which the Ecumenical Refugee Commission has been allowed to do, has, in spite of its limitations, taken on the significance of an inescapable duty."

The Bible Department reports:—

"During the last year the difficulties with which the national Bible Societies on the Continent have to cope have greatly increased. Several of these national societies have been forced by the authorities to cease the printing and sale of Scriptures. And in a number of cases paper is no longer obtainable for the printing of Bibles because the existing quantities must be reserved for 'more important purposes.' But the demand for Scriptures does not grow less. On the contrary. Among the millions of bombarded, deported, interned, isolated, and uprooted men and women, and, above all, in the suffering churches, there is a new desire to find an anchor in the Word of God."

The title of the last section is "Preparing for the Future," and says:—

"One of the most urgent of these post-war tasks will be the one of reconstruction of church life and Christian institutions. . . . The proposal to set up a Reconstruction Department of the World Council has met with a favourable response in the United States and in Britain, where strong and representative committees have been set up which are in close touch with the Federal Council of Churches and with the British Council of Churches, as well as with the missionary bodies. It has also been well received in the European Churches: . . ."

I.C.P.I.S. (Geneva),

July, 1943.